

## WHO THE ITALIAN "FASCISTI" ARE

**I**TALIAN POLITICAL DISORDERS in various parts of the peninsula are reported so continuously as being put down by the *Fascisti*, who are as passionately Nationalist as they are anti-Bolshevik, that much interest and curiosity is manifested beyond the Alps as to who and what the *Fascisti* are. The Secretary of the Central Committee which directs the *Fascisti* from the great Lombard city of Milan, Mr. Umberto Pasella, gives an authoritative statement about the organization to the Rome correspondent of the London *Morning Post*, in which we read that the main object of the *Fascisti* is "to combat Bolshevism as the degeneration of Socialism," especially because of its violence, and this journalist notes that the *Fascisti* seem to have adopted the reprisal law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." All the Italian political parties have furnished members to the *Fasci*, which is the name of the organizations in mass, "except the Catholic Popular party on the one hand, and of course the Communist and official Socialist parties on the other." Even the Conservative wing of the Socialists, the so-called *Riformisti*, is represented in the *Fasci*, and the Republicans have a few members of these bodies. Yet in Italy, it is noted, that, except in the Romagna, where it is a Conservative party as against Socialism, Republicanism is "a small and dwindling party." We read then:

"Each *Fascio* possesses so-called *squadre de azione* ('squadrons of action'), composed of young men who have mostly served in the war. Each of these 'squadrons' has a commandant, named by the directing council of the particular *Fascio*. There is a general committee at Milan, which supervises the whole movement, but each *Fascio* enjoys complete local autonomy for its own affairs. Between the local *Fascio* and the central committee comes the provincial federation, corresponding to the provinces into which Italy is divided for administrative purposes. Whenever an incident occurs between Bolsheviki and *Fascisti*, help, if required, is sent to the local *Fascio* by other *Fasci*.

"Every *Fascista* pays to his own *Fascio* an annual subscription, which varies according to the locality; thus, in Milan it is twenty-four lire; in Turin, eighteen. Besides, there are benefactors who give large sums and who are called sustaining members. In every district where there are students the local *Fascio* contains an *vanguardia studentesca* ('students' vanguard'); there are at present sixty of these students' patriotic societies, which have a general secretary of their own, Signor Luigi Freddi; but they all depend upon the Central Committee. All the *Fascisti* are armed, and there are even female *Fascisti*. I was told of one of these lady warriors, whose exploits with the staff equal those of some of Ariosto's fighting heroines. I believe she is unmarried."

In explanation of the statement that the *Fascisti* do not recruit their ranks from the Catholic Popular party, *The Morning Post's* correspondent advises us that this is partly due to the fact that the *Fascisti* advocate the abolition of the allowance to bishops and the religious congregations paid by the Government. In foreign policies, the *Fascisti* are expansionists, especially in the matter of economic concessions, and this informant adds:

"There have been other *Fasci* before the present, for the word, derived from the Latin *fascia* ('a bandage'), means any league or association. Thus, the associations of laborers and sulfur-workers, which caused the agrarian agitation in Sicily in 1892, were called *Fasci*, and a year or two ago the Coalition of Interventionist parties in Parliament was known as the *Fascio*, the essence of the word being the close union of different elements in a common cause which binds them all together. The present *Fasci di Combattimento*, to give them their full name, were created in March, 1919, by Benito Mussolini, the well-known editor of the *Popolo d'Italia* of Milan, and were directed against the Neutralists. The first congress of the new organization, then numbering only a few persons, was held on March 23 of that year, by the end of 1919 there were forty *Fasci*, and to-day Signor Pasella estimates the number of *Fasci* as 400, with a membership of 100,000."